

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Avalanche Advisory

Contact: Kevin Davis (208) 265-6686, Ed Odegaard (208) 245-6209, or John Olson (208) 265-6608

This message available by calling (208) 765-7323 or toll-free at 1-866-489-8664.

E-mail address: kevingdavis@fs.fed.us, eodegaard@fs.fed.us, jrolson@fs.fed.us

Good Morning, This is Kevin Davis here with the avalanche advisory, valid for today, January 1st, 2010. This report does not apply to local ski areas within the forecast region and will remain in effect through midnight, January 1st. Special thanks to Idaho Parks and Recreation for sponsoring this morning's avalanche advisory. A special New Years cheer and thanks also goes to Dave Alley with Silver Mountain Ski Patrol, Jesse Salisbury with Schweitzer Mountain Ski Patrol, and Pat Lynch who called in with snow pit observations.

WEATHER

For the next 24-48 hours North Idaho will experience a warm weather pattern that will pack a 1,2,3 punch and stress our cold, structurally weak snowpack to the breaking point. The combination of forecasted strong winds, heavy snowfall, and warming temperatures could produce a widespread avalanche cycle in steeper terrain above 4,000 feet. The weather up to this point has created several weak layers in the snowpack and the latest surface hoar formation is intact on multiple aspects and now buried by the most recent storm snow. The National Weather Service has issued a Winter Storm Warning for the northern portion of our forecast region. Note however that the expected weather for the southern portion is nearly identical. For today there is a very good chance of 4-8 inches of snow, winds will be moderate out of the south with strong gusts. Temperatures will be on the rise and the freezing elevation will be around 4,500 feet. Tonight the snowfall continues with an additional 3-7 inches, winds becoming strong out of the SW, higher gusts, and warm temperatures in the high 20's. Saturday breaks with a very good chance of several more inches of snow, strong westerly winds, and temperatures in the low 30's but on the decline. Snow is expected to continue into the evening with the temperature dropping overnight and south winds abating. **Avalanche conditions will increase for the Winter Storm Warning period and a 24 hour period following.**

Avalanche conditions for the entire Idaho Panhandle National Forest Advisory Area are rated as HIGH on windloaded aspects steeper than 35 above 5,000 feet. Natural and human triggered avalanches are likely. Avalanche conditions are rated as CONSIDERABLE on all aspects steeper than 30 degrees above 5,000 feet. Natural avalanches are possible and human triggered avalanches are probable. Use caution in and in proximity to steep terrain.

Snowpack

Eric and I headed up to Trestle Ridge in the Cabinet Mountains yesterday and found 3-4 feet of cold, faceted snow with 2-3 crust layers that provided some of the weak shears in our pits. The easiest shears came at the sugary snow 10-12 inches off the ground. We

also noted surface hoar at the top of the sugar snow. Another layer of surface hoar has been buried by the most recent storm snow and is intact on all aspects. We produced some whumphing on this layer when stepping on to a windslab on a NW aspect. On Lookout Pass, Dan was getting moderate but good clean quality shears on the same layer about 1 foot off the ground with a slight crust associated with it. Nothing major jumped out in his pit but he did note that it was structurally weak which is important when considering the load expected from this storm. At Schweitzer, Jesse was getting moderate shears in the upper few inches and midpack both around crust layers. His pit profile showed the weaker structure of the pack and definitely the sugary snow at the base. Dave Alley, at Silver Mountain produced some easy shears in his pit on a NW aspect. What does all this mean? The pack stabilized a little but not enough that it will stand up to the heavy load of new snow that we are expecting.

Terrain

We're still a little lean on snow so watch out for obstacles under the surface. Eric and I noticed stiff windslabs starting to form already on exposed aspects yesterday. These will be getting additional load and getting denser as the winds pick up with the passage of the storm. Exposed areas at higher elevation especially on SW, W, NW aspects will be areas to be particularly cautious. If you find yourself going from powder up on to a firm windslab, and you're on steep terrain you'd best get off. Windloaded areas will be sensitive also, cornices and loaded areas below them. If you're experiencing rain, that's always a bummer, but count on conditions going sour in a hurry. Stay away from steep terrain traps like gullies and big road cuts. We're likely to see some intense weather and we have a weak snowpack right now so you'll have to be on your avalanche game and playing it safe. The conditions should stabilize a little with cooler weather on Sunday.

If you are out and about in the mountains, which I know you will be, and you see avalanche activity or you have some pit information, please give us a call or email so we can include it in the advisory.

If you're at Schweitzer Mountain this week and have your avalanche gear take advantage of the free avalanche beacon training at 10AM on Sunday at the Clock Tower. Schweitzer Patrol will help you hone your skills with a 1 hour free training. After that, hit the beacon park at the top of the Basin Express, compliments of the Selkirk Powder Company. For a great resource for avalanche education and weather observations check out <http://www.selkirkpowderco.com/>.

The State of Idaho Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the IPNF-AC, is conducting (**Free**) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers this winter in Coeur d' Alene on January 8 and 9, Sandpoint February 12-13, and in Priest Lake March 5-6. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at www.parksand recreation.idaho.gov, or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

The Panhandle Avalanche Center in Sandpoint and Sandpoint Parks and Recreation is sponsoring free avalanche workshops for all snowgoers. "Decision Making in the

Backcountry" workshops will be offered 1/6/10 and 2/10/10. These are offered at the old Federal Building in Sandpoint and are ***Free to the public***. For class schedules in the Silver Valley contact Dan Frigard at 752-5130. In Avery contact Ed Odegaard at 245-6209.

If you have a group or club that is interested in more education on avalanche safety we will be available for free avalanche awareness classes beginning in December, so feel free to give us a call. As usual we would appreciate hearing from anyone who happens to observe any recent avalanche activity while out in the backcountry or just wants to let us know what is going on in their area. You can reach Kevin Davis in Sandpoint by calling (208) 265-6686 and Ed Odegaard in Avery by calling (208) 245-6209.

Avalanche conditions change for better or worse continually. Backcountry travelers should be prepared to assess current conditions for themselves, plan their routes of travel accordingly, and never travel alone. Backcountry travelers can reduce their exposure to avalanche hazards by utilizing timbered trails and ridge routes and by avoiding open and exposed terrain with slope angles of 30 degrees or more. Backcountry travelers should carry the necessary avalanche rescue equipment such as a shovel, avalanche probe or probe ski poles, a rescue beacon and a well-equipped first aid kit.

Have a safe and pleasant weekend.